

**Christian Freedom—and Christian love**  
**Romans 14:1-15:13**  
**May 10th 2026**  
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When I first heard the teaching of Romans chapters 14 and 15 I was really surprised.

Paul describes two kinds of Christian, those who are “weak” in their faith and those who are “strong.” “Weak” Christians, he says, have lots of hang-ups, “we don’t do this, we can’t go there” while “strong” Christians exercise their freedom in Christ. I was surprised because I had thought that a Christian who “doesn’t go here” and “wouldn’t do that” was the strong Christian! But Paul is saying, no they’re the weak ones! And every Christian I had met with lots of hang-ups always gave me the impression to me that they were the strong and spiritually mature. I wouldn’t be surprised if someone here this morning is equally surprised today, as I was back then.

Remember, we’re in the final lap of Romans. Paul has explained the Gospel, chapters 1-11 and now he is explaining how to live in the light of the Gospel; and apart from a short detour about obeying our secular leaders, these chapters are all about how Christians are to love one another. This morning’s sermon is about how Christians are to love one another when they disagree with each other. There are bound to be differences between us, Paul calls them “disputable matters” in 14:1, “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters.”

How are we to live with, cope with, our differences? Three simple points:

**1. Christians can disagree on disputable matters**

It’s OK for Christians to disagree with one another on matters of practice. On the main moral issues, Christians are in complete agreement with each other. Concerning the commandments God gave to Moses:

- Don’t worship idols
- Honour your mother and father
- Do not commit adultery
- Do not murder
- Do not steal
- Do not covet
- And so on,

...there is no dispute. If God clearly prohibits something in the Bible, then to do that thing is to disobey him and to sin. In addition to the commandments given to Moses, there are other prohibitions in Scripture, such as “do not get drunk on wine” (in Ephesians 5) - “instead - the wonderful Christian alternative— be filled with the Spirit” and let there be “no obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking which are out of place” - (also from Ephesian 5) but—another admirable Christian alternative—mouths filled with “thanksgiving.”

But apart from these prohibitions, all given for our good, the field of Christian freedom is very large. Think of Christian behaviour as a very large field, with a fence around it. The fence is the commands of God, put there to protect us. Christians are very free! We can do anything.... except that which God forbids!

Jesus lived a free life—it's one of the reasons the religious leaders hated him—their lives were filled with a thousand petty man-made rules, Jesus was free! "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" says Paul in Galatians 5:1. I remember a former Muslim explaining that one of the things that drew him to Christ was observing the freedom of Christian people—they lived such free lives!

But this remarkable freedom can cause issues between one Christian and another. Because one Christian takes a certain view of an issue (we're not talking about "right" and "wrong" here) and a fellow Christian takes another view over the same issue.

They disagree, what should they do?

It's time to give examples!

In the church at Rome, Christians from Jewish backgrounds and pagan backgrounds who saw things from different perspectives.

Example 1: meat. Stroll down to the market and some of the meat stalls sold meat that had first been offered to idols. A Christian who came from a pagan background couldn't touch that stuff, it reminded him of the years he had spent worshipping idols. He decided he would only eat vegetables to avoid the possibility of in anyway being involved with idolatry again. But a Christian from a Jewish background was quite happy to buy and eat that meat. To him an idol is nothing! Can you see the problem? Some in the church only ate vegetables, others ate everything!

Example 2: special days. All Christians took the Lord's day seriously as an opportunity to meet together, but Christians from a Jewish background, who had previously kept many special days in the year, found it hard to just abandon them now!

We may not have those differences today, but here are some of things on which Christians disagree on:

- Should a Christians consume alcohol? None of us should get drunk, but some think yes, others think no
- Who to vote for? Labour, Conservative, Green, Reform? Liberal Democrats?
- Should you vote at all?
- How to spend your money—all Christians give some of their money to support the world of the Gospel—we thank God for the faithful givers in this congregation—if you do not yet give, we encourage you to do so. But how Christians spend the rest of their disposable income

differs from one believer to another

- Bible translations? Some think only this particular translation, others use a wide range
- Parenting—this is a big one! How much rope should you give your children? What should you allow them to do and at what age? Some parents are very strict, other give more rope! Should you home school them or send them to state schools?
- Christmas and Easter are not in the Bible, shall we celebrate them or hibernate?
- Communion—should we have a single cup or separate cups, a single loaf or small portions of bread, shall we use wine or Ribena?
- And so on and so forth!

On all these issues and many more Christians disagree! It's part of the diverse glory of the church, we're all different in so many ways.

I was passing a church building the other day, and saw a poster in the window: "Worcestershire loves diversity". I don't know the motive for putting that council poster in the church-building window, but if it was to say to the world, "the church is trying to catch up with you guys in the world, we're trying to be diverse," they have got matters exactly upside down. The church has nothing to learn from the world about diversity. There is no more diverse group of people than a gathering of believers! The world has a lot to learn from the church, not the other way round.

We should expect glorious diversity in the church from the God who created between 400,000 and 2.1 million different species of beetle! We shouldn't be surprised! The question is how should we handle our differences?

## 2. ....Christians must accept one another over disputable matters

The negative is...

...don't judge one another:

"Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgement on disputable matters." (14:1) and verse 3, "The one who eats everything (that is the strong Christian) must not look down on the one who does not. And the one who does not eat everything (the weak Christian) must not *condemn the man who does.*"

The tendency of the *strong Christian* is to look down at the weak Christian and say "Don't be so silly, idols are nothing, don't be so daft, eat meat," and the tendency of the *weak Christian* is to say to the strong Christian "don't be so worldly! How can you eat meat that has been offered to a pagan idol. You're worldly bro." Both are wrong to judge the other because we are not that person's master or judge: "*Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand*" (14: 4). "*We will all stand before God's judgement seat.*" (14:10)

The positive is, instead of judging one another on disputable matters to accept one another, “*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*” (15:7). Don’t stand aloof, but rather welcome one another, fully, wholeheartedly, into your affections around your table, because Christ has accepted them!

Remember that they have taken their stance in the Lord, just as you have taken your stance in the Lord: “*He who eats meat eats to the Lord, for he give thanks to God; and he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*” (14:6)

The believer who voted reform did so prayerfully, the believer who voted Greens did so in the Lord. On both sides, we’re all doing our best to please the Lord!

And now for the hard part. We must learn to love one another sacrificially in disputable matters.

### **3. Christians must love one another sacrificially over disputable matters**

Four ways we can love your brother or sisters sacrificially:

1) *Put everything in perspective—there are more important things than those disputable matters*

*“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (14:17)*

In the grand scheme of things, what we eat and drink, what we disagree about is not all that important.

*“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food” (14:19-120)*

**2) Don’t even mention your differences!**

How wise you would show yourself to be if you just said nothing, “*Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God.*” (14:22) You don’t need to go around telling everyone what you think and what you practice.

I once had a friend who believed in infant baptism, he was wrong, but who’s perfect?.

He had joined a Baptist church because it was the Bible believing church in his area and decided he would say nothing whatsoever about his convictions. I was in numerous Bible studies with him and not once did he say a word about his beliefs. I did not even know he be was a paedobaptist until many years later. And when I did I stood in awe of this most remarkable brother.

Just say nothing about your convictions, die to your self. For sure, don’t go around the church telling everyone what you think about disputable matters, stirring up division.

**3) Avoid whatever hurts your brother,** *“Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block in your brother’s way” (14:13)*

If you invite a friend to your house who you know has decided not to drink alcohol but you feel at liberty to do so—I knew a brother who had given up drink forever because of its devastating effect on his family—when you invite him into your house, don’t put a bottle of wine on the table, just imagine how upset he would be! In fact you might even decide to remove any wine bottles on show in the kitchen. You’re not being deceitful, you’re being loving.

Just go for Shloer that day, *“Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block in your brother’s way” (14:13)*

And now the Rolls Royce of Christian love, you may even decide to...

**4) Change your behaviour, for the sake of the weak**

*“If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.” (14:15)*  
*“It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to stumble.” (14:21)*

In other words deny your freedom, curtail your freedom, for the sake of love your brother.

Isn’t that what Jesus did? He denied himself for our sakes; he denied himself the worship of angels, the splendour of heaven’s throne, and sacrificed himself for our sake: *“For even Christ did not please himself but as it is written, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” (15:3)*

What happens when God’s diverse people live together in harmony like this? When they love, accept and welcome one another, with all their differences?

Two wonderful things:

**God is glorified:**

*“Accept one another, then just as Christ has accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7)*

**And God’s blessing descends on the church:**

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” begins Psalm 133 ending with: “For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.”

May the Lord help each of us respond to his love for us, by responding to his Word today.